

Gone With The Wind is just about the biggest movie of all time. Made in 1939, it is still a superb example of the filmmaker's art and has power to draw large audiences all over the world. Yet, considering the film's turbulent production history, it's surprising that it turned out as well as it did. Victor Fleming, the film's credited director, turned down an early chance of a percentage of the film's profits (in exchange for a small cut in salary) in the belief it was a huge white elephant. That it wasn't is almost entirely due to its producer, David Selznick.

Selznick was an old-style movie mogul who had already given the world a string of memorable productions, including *King Kong* (1933) and *A Star Is Born* (1936). He discovered *Gone With The Wind* in 1936 when his secretary encouraged him to read an advance copy of



Leslie Howard and Olivia de Havilland

After purchasing the rights to film the book, Selznick was faced with the difficult task of adapting it to the screen. A literal adaptation would have resulted in a movie lasting 168 hours! This was obviously out of the question, and so he hired respected Broadway playwright Sidney Howard to condense the half million word story into acceptable movie length. Howard telescoped the book into a concise six-hour shooting script, upon which Selznick himself performed major surgery, cutting out scenes and characters in a ruthless attempt to whittle it down to size.

Unhappy with his labours, he hired a total of sixteen other writers, including the legendary F. Scott Fitzgerald, to adapt the novel. But their efforts only made him realise the original Sidney Howard version was the best, and with some more alteration it became the movie's final shooting script.

A similar thing happened with the creation of *Tara* — the stately Southern mansion that Selznick felt was the key to capturing the book's charm. Twenty five sketches were submitted by production designer William Cameron Menzies and Selznick turned them all down. In desperation, Menzies put forward the first sketch again, labelling it "Proposal Number 26". This time Selznick was enthused. "Now you've got it," he said, "that's *Tara*."

Selznick's vision of his film was complete before the cameras even began turning. He utilised a pre-production plan similar to that used today by director/producers like Spielberg and George



Gone With The Wind, the original poster featuring Gable and Leigh

Margaret Mitchell's weighty (1,037 pages) novel about the life and loves of fiery Southern belle, Scarlett O'Hara, set against the turbulent background of a nation torn apart in Civil War.

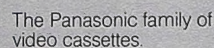
The story captured his imagination as it was to entrance millions when later published, shooting to the top of the bestseller lists and selling over a million copies within the first six months.

Selznick used to say that "great films are made in their every detail according to the vision of one man." In the case of *Gone With The Wind*, that man was to be himself. His judgement was exercised on every small detail of set design, costumes, scripting, music, editing and direction. The top quality technicians he employed were all kept on a very short leash, and continually bombarded with memos concerning Selznick's opinions. Any member of the production team who disagreed with him found themselves replaced.

"You must think I'm an idiot," said Victor Fleming, when offered a percentage on *Gone With The Wind*, which he directed, "this movie is going to be the biggest white elephant of all time!" Allan Bryce takes a look at the teething problems of cinema's greatest epic, now available on video . . .

Figure 1 is a graph comparing the roughness of magnetic surfaces. The vertical axis is labeled 'Colour S/N' and ranges from 0dB to 5dB. The horizontal axis is labeled 'Roughness of Magnetic Surface' and ranges from 0.030µm to 0.020µm. Two data points are plotted: 'Normal tape' at 0.030µm and 0dB, and 'Super HG tape' at 0.020µm and 5dB. An orange arrow points from the Normal tape point to the Super HG tape point, indicating a transition from a higher roughness and lower S/N to a lower roughness and higher S/N.

Great video picture quality won't last long if magnetic particles fall off the tape. Our Super μ -Binder System binds them so firmly to the surface base of the Super HG tape that dropout (a flickering picture) is about 10% less than normal tape.

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Clarke Gable plays Rhett Butler and Ona Munson is Bette Watling, enticing Rhett after he has been barred from Scarlett's room

Lucas: thousands of miniature drawings were turned out by a battery of illustrators to depict all the scenes in the movie as Selznick saw them, allowing him to exercise total control over the look of the film.

The major problem remaining to him was the casting of a star big enough to play the central role of Scarlett O'Hara. He put out the biggest casting call in the history of Hollywood, during which over 1,400 possibles were interviewed for the sought-after role, including Bette Davis, Lucille Ball, Susan Hayward, Lana Turner and Carole Lombard. But by December 1938 no Scarlett had been found, and shooting was scheduled to begin the following month.

The Hollywood version of the casting



Clarke Gable exuded cynical manliness

flames with oil as the Culver City fire department watched on anxiously. Also among the onlookers were Selznick's brother Myron and his dinner guests, Laurence Olivier and an attractive young actress named Vivian Leigh. As the fires began to dwindle, David Selznick looked over at the beautiful British actress and saw the dying flames reflected in the same pale green eyes that Margaret Mitchell had described so vividly in her novel. He knew then that he had found his Scarlett O'Hara . . . And that's as good a story as any!

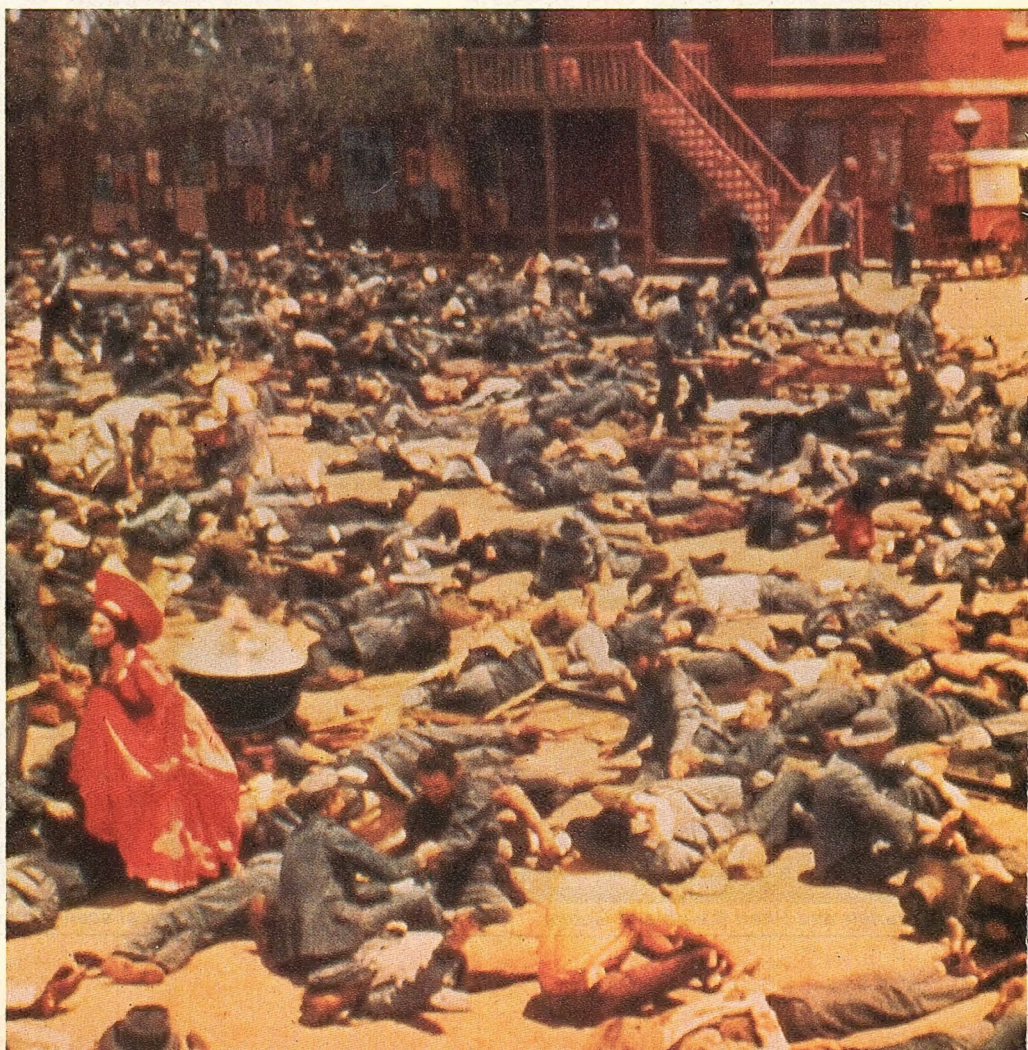
The famous Atlanta Bazaar scene

For Scarlett's blockade-running rogue of a husband, Rhett Butler, no such casting problem existed, the public had already unanimously decided on Clark Gable for the role. He was undoubtedly the biggest box-office draw of the time and the cynical manliness he exuded which appealed to men and women alike was a characteristic of Rhett Butler's in the novel. But Gable was unhappy with Selznick's choice of director, feeling that the stylish George Cukor (whose work on films like *A Star Is Born* had earned him a reputation as a "woman's director") would focus attention more on Scarlett



Vivien Leigh outside Tara

of Vivian Leigh in the role goes like this . . . David Selznick planned to shoot the film's most spectacular sequence, the burning of Atlanta, on a studio backlot where a number of vintage sets needed clearing to make way for the building of Tara. An intricate network of pipes was threaded through the facades erected to represent Atlanta, which would fuel the



Gone with the Wind



Rhett Butler (Gable) lights up a mother's eyes in the opening Ball scene

than his own character.

Cukor was replaced early on with Victor Fleming, a hard drinking womaniser who was one of Gable's best friends and who had a reputation for macho, male-oriented action movies. This obviously delighted Gable, and explains why Scarlett's behaviour in the movie often seems to vacillate between that of a resourceful heroine (in the Cukor scenes) and a selfish bitch (Fleming's work).

Despite this, a great deal of the film's appeal comes from the fact that Scarlett O'Hara, as immortalised magnificently by Vivian Leigh, is a liberated woman in

an age when they were a rare animal indeed. Her character was not based in any way upon Margaret Mitchell's — the authoress was a shy and quiet woman who spent seven years researching her novel and seven years writing it, only to be killed by a drunken driver while crossing an Atlanta street, a short time after the film had made her a household name.

When the movie came out in 1939 it was a colossal success, quickly repaying its huge (3,957,000 dollars) production cost and earning itself ten Oscars into the bargain. It was estimated that a staggering twenty-five million people had

seen the film by the end of 1940 and, until ousted in 1966 by *The Sound of Music*, it led the list of top grossing movies of all time.

Gone With The Wind's arrival on video will introduce a generation of new fans to its timeless appeal. MGM/UA have carefully prepared the tape from fresh master negatives and it boasts an electronically enhanced soundtrack which will appeal to stereo video buffs. They are hoping that, at £30 or less, people will buy the video. But whether you buy it or hire it, this is one film you'll want to see again and again — whenever you've got the odd four hours to spare! □

Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara. Gable and Leigh play the great screen lovers



Scarlett and Rhett (Leigh and Gable)



A quizzical scene from Gone With The Wind